

social customs. Conversely, many examples exist of peoples who live under different environmental conditions but adopt similar social customs. Of course, people respond to their environment, but the environment is only one of several controls over social customs.

Customs such as provision of food, clothing, and shelter are clearly influenced by the prevailing climate, soil, and vegetation. For example, residents of arctic climates may wear fur-lined boots, which protect against the cold, and snowshoes, with which to walk on soft, deep snow without sinking in. On the other hand, people living in warm and humid climates may not need any footwear if heavy rainfall and time spent in water discourage such use. The custom in the Netherlands of wearing wooden shoes may appear quaint, but it actually derives from environmental conditions. Dutch farmers wear the wooden shoes, which are waterproof, as they work in fields that often are extremely wet because much of the Netherlands is below sea level.

Environmental conditions can limit the variety of human actions anywhere, but folk societies are particularly responsive to the environment because of their low level of technology and the prevailing agricultural economy. People living in folk cultures are likely to be farmers growing their own food, using hand tools and animal power.

Yet folk culture may ignore the environment. Not all arctic residents wear snowshoes, nor do all people in wet temperate climates wear wooden shoes. Geographers observe that broad differences in folk culture arise in part from physical conditions and that these conditions produce varied customs.

Two necessities of daily life—food and shelter—demonstrate the influence of cultural values and the environment on the development of unique folk culture. Different folk societies prefer different foods and styles of house construction.

Distinctive Food Preferences

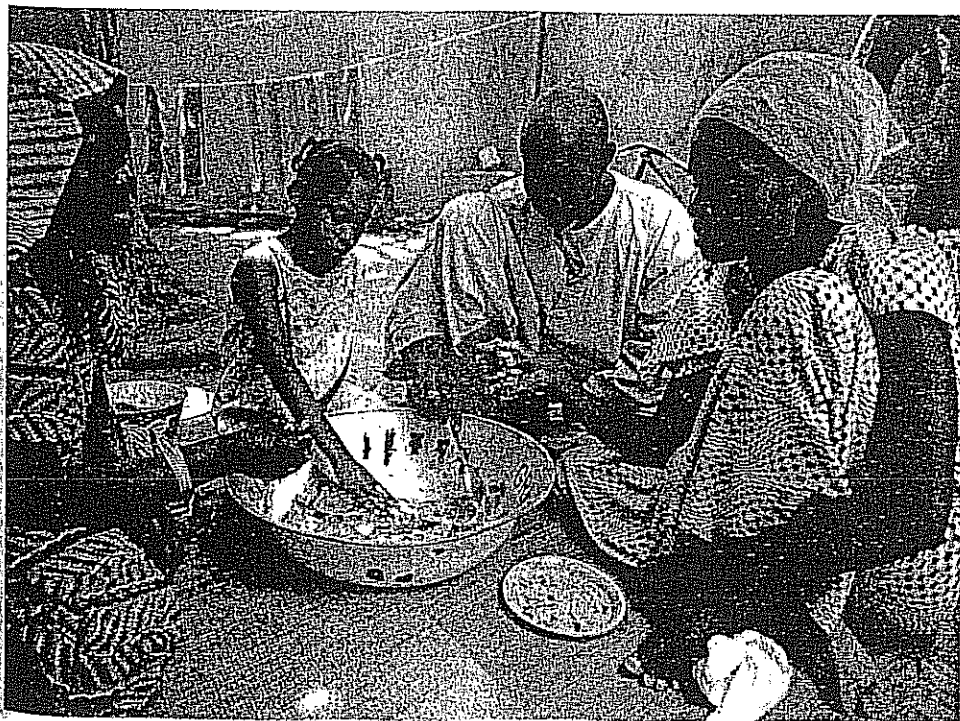
Folk food habits derive from the environment. According to nineteenth-century geographer Vidal de la Blache, "Among the connections that tie [people] to a certain environment, one of the most tenacious is food supply; clothing and weapons are more subject to modification than the dietary regime, which experience has shown to be best suited to human needs in a given climate."

PAYING ATTENTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT. Humans eat mostly plants and animals—living things that spring from the soil and water of a region. Inhabitants of a region must consider the soil, climate, terrain, vegetation, and other characteristics of the environment in deciding to produce particular foods. For example, rice demands a milder, moist climate, whereas wheat thrives in colder, drier regions.

People adapt their food preferences to conditions in the environment. A good example is soybeans, which are an excellent source of protein and are widely grown in Asia. In the raw state they are toxic and indigestible. Lengthy cooking renders them edible, but fuel is scarce in Asia. Asians have adapted to this environmental dilemma by deriving foods from soybeans that do not require extensive cooking. These include bean sprouts (germinated seeds), soy sauce (fermented soybeans), and bean curd (steamed soybeans).

In Europe, traditional preferences for quick-frying foods in Italy resulted in part from fuel shortages. In Northern Europe, an abundant wood supply encouraged the slow stewing and roasting of foods over fires, which also provided home heat in the colder climate.

The contribution of a location's distinctive physical features to the way food tastes is known by the French term *terroir*. The word comes from the same root as *terre* (French word for land or



Food customs. A family in Senegal eats their lunch. A meal in Senegal is often served in a deep enamel bowl, large enough for several people to share. Food is retrieved from the bowl using three fingers of the right hand.

earth), but *terroir* does not translate precisely into English; it has a similar meaning to the English expressions "grounded" or "sense of place." *Terroir* is the sum of the effects of the local environment on a particular food item. The term is frequently used to refer to the combination of soil, climate, and other physical features that contribute to the distinctive taste of a wine.

Bostans, which are small gardens inside Istanbul, Turkey, have been supplying the city with fresh produce for hundreds of years (Figure 4-5). According to geographer Paul Kaldjian, Istanbul has around 1,000 bostans, run primarily by immigrants from Cide, a rural village in Turkey's Kastamonu province.

Bostan farmers are able to maximize yields from their small plots of land (typically 1 hectare) through what Kaldjian calls clever and efficient manipulation of space, season, and resources. Fifteen to twenty different types of vegetables are planted at different times of the year, and the choice is varied from year to year, in order to reduce the risk of damage from poor weather.

Most of the work is done by older men, who prepare beds for planting, sow, irrigate, and operate motorized equipment, according to Kaldjian. Women weed, and both men and women harvest.

FOOD DIVERSITY IN TRANSYLVANIA. Food customs are inevitably affected by the availability of products, but people do not simply eat what is available in their particular

environment. Food habits are strongly influenced by cultural traditions. What is eaten establishes one's social, religious, and ethnic memberships. The surest way to identify a family's ethnic origins is to look in its kitchen.

In Transylvania, currently part of Romania, food preferences distinguish among groups who have long lived in close proximity. A century ago, before killings and emigrations during the World War II era, Transylvania contained about 4 million Hungarians; 4 million Romanians; 500,000 to 600,000 Saxons; 50,000 to 75,000 Jews; 20,000 to 25,000 Armenians; and several thousand Szeklers. The Saxons and Szeklers were German peoples who migrated to Transylvania in the ninth century. The Hungarians conquered Transylvania in 1003 and ruled it with few interruptions until losing it to Romania after World War I. Most Jews came to the region with the Hungarians. Most of the Armenians migrated to Transylvania in the 1600s to escape the Muslim-controlled Ottoman Empire to the southeast.

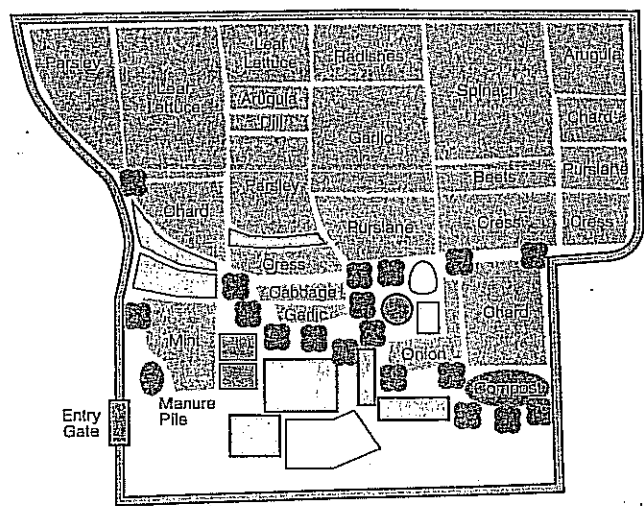
Soup, the food consumed by poorer people, shows the distinctive traditions of the neighboring cultural groups in Transylvania. Romanians made sour bran soups from cracked wheat, corn, brown bread, and cherry tree twigs. Saxons instead simmered fatty pork in water, added sauerkraut or vinegar, and often used fruits. Jews preferred soups made from beets and sorrel (a leafy vegetable) rather than from meat. Armenians made soup based on *churut* (curdled milk) and ground vegetables. Hungarians added smoked bacon to the soup and thickened it with flour and onion fried in lard. Szeklers—who adopted many Jewish dietary practices, including the avoidance of pork products—substituted smoked goose or other poultry for the bacon in the Hungarian recipes.

Distinctive food preferences among groups from Transylvania have continued, even after many migrated to the United States. Long after dress, manners, and speech have become indistinguishable from those of the majority, old food habits often continue as the last vestige of traditional folk customs.

FOOD ATTRACTIONS AND TABOOS. According to many folk customs, everything in nature carries a signature, or distinctive characteristic, based on its appearance and natural properties. Consequently, people may desire or avoid certain foods in response to perceived beneficial or harmful natural traits.

Certain foods are eaten because their natural properties are perceived to enhance qualities considered desirable by the society, such as strength, fierceness, or lovemaking ability. The Abipone Indians of Paraguay eat jaguars and bulls to make them strong, brave, and swift. The mandrake, a plant native to Mediterranean climates, was thought to enhance an individual's lovemaking abilities. The smell of the plant's orange-colored berries is attractive, but the mandrake's association with sexual prowess comes primarily from the appearance of the root, which is thick, fleshy, and forked, suggesting a man's torso. In parts of Africa and the Middle East, the mandrake's root is administered as a drug, and several references to its powers are found in the Bible.

People refuse to eat particular plants or animals that are thought to embody negative forces in the environment. Such a restriction on behavior imposed by social custom is a taboo.



LEGEND

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| Building: shed, work yard, storage, kitchen, quarters | Fruit or shade tree, typically fig or mulberry |
| Seedbed | Well |
| Vegetable crop | Pool for washing and preparing vegetables |
| Nursery / hothouse for starting plants early | Beehive |

FIGURE 4-5 Istanbul bostan. Geographer Paul Kaldjian sketched a typical bostan, a traditional vegetable garden in the center of Istanbul, Turkey. Although declining in importance, bostans still provide residents of the large city of Istanbul with a source of fresh vegetables.

Other social customs, such as sexual practices, carry prohibitions, but taboos are especially strong in the area of food.

The Ainu in Japan avoid eating otters because they are believed to be forgetful animals and consuming them could cause loss of memory. Europeans blamed the potato, the first edible plant they had encountered that grew from tubers rather than seeds, for a variety of problems during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including typhoid, tuberculosis, and famine. Initially, Europeans also resisted eating the potato because it resembled human deformities caused by leprosy.

Before becoming pregnant, the Mbum Kpau women of Chad do not eat chicken or goat. Abstaining from consumption of these animals is thought to help escape pain in childbirth and to prevent birth of a child with abnormalities. During pregnancy, Mbum Kpau women avoid meat from antelopes with twisted horns, which could cause them to bear offspring with deformities. In the Trobriand Islands off the eastern tip of Papua New Guinea, couples are prohibited from eating meals together before marriage, whereas premarital sexual relations are an accepted feature of social life.

Some folk cultures may establish food taboos because of concern for the natural environment. These taboos may help to protect endangered animals or to conserve scarce natural resources. For example, to preserve scarce animal species, only a few high-ranking people in some tropical regions are permitted to hunt, whereas the majority cultivate crops. However, most food-avoidance customs arise from cultural values.

Relatively well-known taboos against consumption of certain foods can be found in the Bible. The ancient Hebrews were prohibited from eating a wide variety of foods, including animals that do not chew their cud or that have cloven feet, and

fish lacking fins or scales. These taboos arose partially from concern for the environment by the Hebrews, who lived as pastoral nomads in lands bordering the eastern Mediterranean. The pig, for example, is prohibited in part because it is more suited to sedentary farming than pastoral nomadism, and in part because its meat spoils relatively quickly in hot climates, such as the Mediterranean. These biblical taboos were developed through oral tradition and by rabbis into the Kosher Laws observed today by some Jews.

Similarly, Muslims embrace the taboo against pork, because pigs are unsuited for the dry lands of the Arabian Peninsula (Figure 4-6). Pigs would compete with humans for food and water without offering compensating benefits, such as being able to pull a plow, carry loads, or provide milk and wool. Widespread raising of pigs would be an ecological disaster in Islam's hearth.

Hindu taboos against consuming cows can also be partly explained by environmental reasons. Cows are the source of oxen (castrated male bovine), the traditional choice for pulling plows as well as carts. A large supply of oxen must be maintained in India, because every field has to be plowed at approximately the same time—when the monsoon rains arrive. Religious sanctions have kept India's cow population large as a form of insurance against the loss of oxen and increasing population.

But the taboo against consumption of meat among many people, including Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, cannot be explained primarily by environmental factors. Social values must influence the choice of diet, because people in similar climates and with similar levels of income consume different foods. The biblical food taboos were established in part to set the Hebrew people apart from others. That Christians

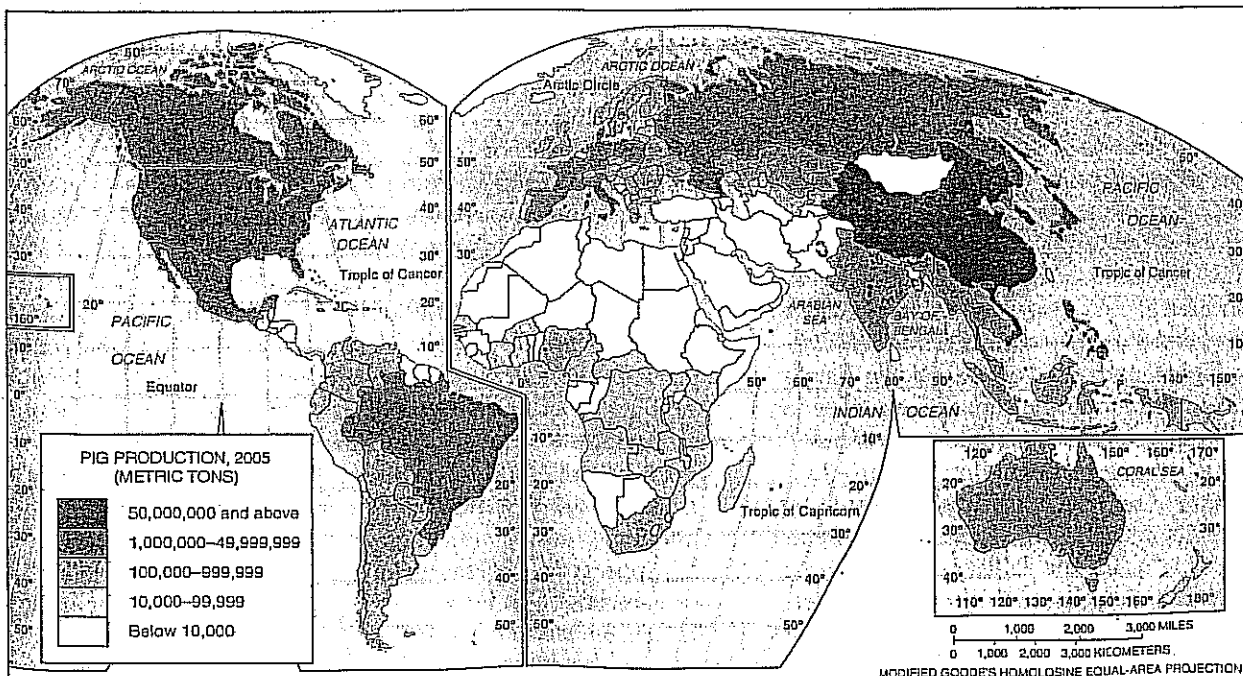


FIGURE 4-6 Annual hog production. The number of hogs produced in different parts of the world is influenced to a considerable extent by religious taboos against consuming pork. Hog production is virtually nonexistent in predominantly Muslim regions, such as northern Africa and southwestern Asia, whereas the level is high in predominantly Buddhist China and predominantly Christian countries.

ignore the biblical food injunctions reflects their desire to distinguish themselves from Jews. Furthermore, as a universalizing religion, Christianity was less tied to taboos that originated in the Middle East (see Chapter 6).

Food taboos are significant even in countries dominated by popular culture, such as the United States. Americans avoid eating insects, despite their nutritional value. In Thailand and Myanmar (Burma), on the other hand, giant water bugs are deep fried as a snack food or ground up in sauces. Mixing insects with rice provides lysine, an amino acid that is often deficient in the diet of people in less developed countries (LDCs), where rice is the staple food. The aversion of most Americans to eating insects is contradicted by consumption of such foods as canned mushrooms and tomato paste, which contain insects although not commonly acknowledged.

Folk Housing

French geographer Jean Brunhes, a major contributor to the cultural landscape tradition, views the house as being among the essential facts of human geography. It is a product of both cultural tradition and natural conditions. American cultural geographer Fred Kniffen considered the house to be a good reflection of cultural heritage, current fashion, functional needs, and the impact of environment.

DISTINCTIVE BUILDING MATERIALS. The type of building materials used to construct folk houses is influenced partly by the resources available in the environment. The two most common building materials in the world are wood and brick, although stone, grass, sod, and skins are also used. If available, wood is generally preferred for house construction because it is easy to build with it. In the past, pioneers who settled in forested regions built log cabins for themselves.

Today, people in MDCs buy lumber that has been cut by machine into the needed shapes. Cut lumber is used to erect a frame, and sheets or strips of wood are attached for the floors, ceilings, and roof. Shingles, stucco, vinyl, aluminum, or other materials may be placed on the exterior for insulation or decoration.

Some societies have limited access to forests and use alternative materials. In relatively hot, dry climates—such as the U.S. Southwest, Mexico, northern China, and parts of the Middle East—bricks are made by baking wet mud in the sun. Stone is used to build houses in parts of Europe and South America and as decoration on the outside of brick or wood houses in other countries.

The choice of building materials is influenced both by social factors and by what is available from the environment. If the desired material is not locally available, then it must be imported. For example, migrants sometimes paved streets and built houses in their new location with the stone ballast placed in the hold of the ship that transported them. Building materials may be available but may be more expensive than alternatives. To save money (as well as trees), most new homes in the United States have interior walls made of drywall (filled with gypsum, a widely available mineral) rather than wood.

DISTINCTIVE HOUSE FORM AND ORIENTATION. Social groups may share building materials, but the distinctive form of their houses may result from customary beliefs or environmental factors. In addition, the orientation of the houses on their plots of land can vary.

The form of houses in some societies might reflect religious values. For example, houses may have sacred walls or corners. The east wall of a house is considered sacred in Fiji, as is the northwest wall in parts of China. Sacred walls or corners are also noted in parts of the Middle East, India, and Africa.

In Madagascar, religious considerations influence the use of each part of the house and even furniture arrangement. The main door is on the west, considered the most important direction, whereas the northeast corner is the most sacred. The north wall is for honoring ancestors; in addition, important guests enter a room from the north and are seated against the north wall. The bed is placed against the east wall of the house, with the head facing north.

Beliefs govern the arrangement of household activities in a variety of Southeast Asian societies. In the south-central part of the island of Java, the front door always faces south, the direction of the South Sea Goddess, who holds the key to Earth.

Figure 4-7 (left) shows a housing custom of the Lao people in northern Laos, who arrange beds perpendicular to the center ridgepole of the house. Because the head is considered high and noble and the feet low and vulgar, people sleep so that their heads will be opposite their neighbor's heads and their feet opposite their neighbor's feet. The principal exception to this arrangement: a child who builds a house next door to the parents sleeps with his or her head toward the parents' feet as a sign of obeying the customary hierarchy.

Although they speak similar Southeast Asian languages and adhere to Buddhism, the Lao do not orient their houses in the same manner as the Yuan and Shan peoples in nearby northern Thailand (Figure 4-7, right). The Yuan and Shan ignore the position of neighbors and all sleep with their heads toward the east, which Buddhists consider the most auspicious direction. Staircases must not face west, the least auspicious direction, the direction of death and evil spirits.

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT. The form of housing is related to environmental as well as social conditions. The construction of a pitched roof is important in wet or snowy climates to facilitate runoff and to reduce the weight of accumulated snow. Windows may face south in temperate climates to take advantage of the Sun's heat and light. In hot climates, on the other hand, window openings may be smaller to protect the interior from the full heat of the Sun.

Even in areas that share similar climates and available building materials, folk housing can vary because of minor differences in environmental features. For example, R. W. McColl compared house types in four villages situated in the dry lands of northern and western China. All use similar building materials, including adobe and timber from the desert poplar tree, and they share a similar objective—protection from extreme temperatures, from very hot summer days to subfreezing winter nights.